



Superfund Job Training:

Washington Navy Yard Case Study Report Update



Introduction

Created in 1996, the Superfund Job Training Initiative (SuperJTI) program provides job training opportunities for people living in neighborhoods detrimentally impacted by Superfund sites. As of January 2004, the Washington Navy Yard SuperJTI project has provided more than 475 Washington, D.C., metropolitan area residents a chance to learn and apply their hazardous waste training skills in jobs across the metro-wide area. With an over 70 percent job placement rate, the program is a proven success. The following stakeholders were interviewed for an update of this project:

- RPM, EPA Region 3;
- CIC, EPA Region 3;
- Alice Hamilton Occupational Health Center (AHOHC), NIEHS training provider and the Institute for Workplace Safety and Health;
- STRIVE DC;
- Covenant House Washington, community-based organization;
- EnviroControls, contractor/employer;
- Asbestos Workers Local Union #24, local union representing workers in the environmental industry;
- Horne Engineering., former contractor/employer; and
- Two SuperJTI trainees.



Washington Navy Yard's Super JTI trainer with students.

Site Description

The Washington Navy Yard is the oldest continuously operated Navy facility in the United States. It currently occupies 71.5 acres in the southeastern portion of the District. It is bordered by the Anacostia River to the south, the Southeast Federal Center to the west, and public housing to the north.

Since the 1800s, the Navy Yard was used for research and industrial activity. But in 1995, the base was designated as a Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) gaining facility, with Navy employees moving into the facility from other military locations that are being closed. In January 1997, the Navy completed an environmental investigation of the Navy Yard's facilities, under EPA oversight. During this review, the Navy environmental section provided recommendations on precautions that must be taken to ensure that the buildings are safe for occupancy. As a part of this effort, the incinerator area at the Navy Yard had hazardous wastes removed during the summer of 1998. The site was listed on the National Priorities List (NPL) as a hazardous waste site in 1998.

EPA Region 3 issued a Resource Conservation Recovery Act (RCRA) 7003 order, effective July 16, 1997. This order required the Navy to perform certain removals as interim measures under Superfund procedures, conduct further studies, and clean up the site based on the results of the studies. The RCRA order remained in effect until EPA and the Department of the Navy signed a final Superfund Interagency Agreement on June 30, 1999. The agreement closed out the RCRA order and put EPA's Superfund program in charge of regulating the Washington Navy Yard site.

How It All Got Started

In 1995, a representative of Horne Engineering, a contractor of the Navy Yard, and the Navy Yard's environmental and safety director wanted to make a positive difference in the community through the facility's cleanup and to address the environmental justice concerns of Southeast Washington, D.C., citizens. There are 28,152 people living within a 1-mile radius of the Navy Yard, with a primarily African American and Caucasian makeup.¹ Their resulting initiative was called "Bridges to Friendship" incorporating the name of one of its founding partners, Friendship House, a community-based agency. The partnership would work through the SuperJTI program and provide training, employment and other direct benefits to the community and its residents. The program would also provide participating partners a way to deliver their services, express their needs, access the resources or other partners, and address community issues together. President Al Gore and the White House Community Empowerment Board recognized Bridges to Friendship in July 1998 for its many accomplishments.

The Bridges to Friendship partnership has greatly evolved since it was formed in 1995. The Alice Hamilton Occupational Health Center (AHOHC) which provided training for the SuperJTI program from its initial beginning till 2002 has since been replaced by the Institute for Workplace Safety and Health. Similar to the training provider turnover, Friendship House, the community-based organization that provided participants and soft skills training, was replaced with STRIVE DC. Covenant House Washington is still an active partner in the program.

¹According to the District of Columbia Government Census Data 2003



Former EPA Administrator Christine Todd Whitman speaks at Washington Navy Yard's Super JTI class.

Recruitment

The Institute for Workplace Safety and Health, STRIVE DC and Covenant House Washington continue to oversee the recruitment process. They focus their recruitment efforts in the Southeast and Southwest area of Washington, DC. Still not needing to use mass media advertising, the three partners place fliers in area churches, community centers and other public gathering places. Recently, they have included in their recruiting efforts the Arlington and DC public school systems. Guidance counselors mention the program to students who will not be attending college. As the program has progressed, word-of-mouth from past graduates has increasingly led to more applicants.

Unlike the past, where recruitment drew few interested persons, today the trainers typically have a pool of 50 to 60 applicants. Of those applicants, the trainers and community partners interview and select approximately 25 trainees. One of the earlier problems of the recruitment process was selecting trainees who should have been screened out. Those individuals "took up valuable space," said a training provider. To fix this problem, the mandatory orientation session now includes more "learning by doing," such as dressing out in protective gear, and less lecturing in a classroom. An applicant's realization of what the job would require physically and mentally helps some self-select out of the program. This approach has proven more successful; however, as one trainer put it, "there is not a 100 percent fool proof method to screen people out."

In addition to changes in the early orientation part of the program, the trainers now also require trainee drug testing prior to beginning the program and at graduation. The screenings are program-paid and if a potential trainee fails on the first screening they are given the chance to be re-screened by graduation. Trainers will not recommended students who fail their last drug screening to employers.

Training Process

AHOHC, which conducted the environmental part of the training in the past, handed over the role to The Institute for Workplace Safety and Health in 2003. Since 1998 two full-time trainings have been conducted each year, with the environmental training taught over the first eight weeks and the soft skills training lasting from 2 to 6 weeks depending on the provider.

About 7 percent of training participants are Latino which created an opportunity to run one program in Spanish. Many of the Latino students were recruited from the unique partnership formed with the Arlington County School System, located in Virginia.

Trainees are unpaid while they are in training but they are given \$25 per week to cover transportation costs. Trainees are also provided free pre-employment physicals which was a barrier to job placement earlier in the program. In addition, the training program added fitness tests, required by many employers, at no cost to the trainee.

During the environmental portion of the training, participants are trained in hazardous material clean-up, asbestos and lead paint abatement, general construction, industrial safety, first aid/CPR, control of biochemical hazards in construction, and other topics. A contractors forum, held in 2001, allowed the program to hear what additional skills contractors required from the trainees. This forum uncovered a need for radiation safety training. Now a staple of the program, radiation safety training has increased job placements of graduates within the hazardous waste hauling industry.

Following the environmental training is the “soft skills” part of the training course, consisting of how to prepare a resume, interview skills and addressing workplace problems. More recently, personal finance and diversity education have been added to the program. STRIVE DC provides soft skills training for trainees it had recruited while AHOHC



Hazardous Materials workers on-site.

and Covenant House Washington provides training for the rest of the class.

The soft skills training curriculum is constantly changing, depending on individual class needs. A trainee provider said that this part of the training is always a struggle since it is tough to assess what the class needs, and topics covered are not always relevant to 100 percent of the class.

Other skills addressed during the soft skills training include math and reading for those students that scored low in those areas on the assessment test given during orientation. The math and reading components of the soft skills training has significantly increased since 1999. And for those trainees who did not already possess a GED or diploma, STRIVE DC offers a GED program.

On average, classes begin with approximately 25 students and graduate between 16-22 students. Many of the students who drop out of the program due so from outside pressures such as childcare, financial concerns, etc.

Job Placement Efforts

At the end of every training session, AHOHC/Institute for Workplace Safety and Health and STRIVE DC host several job fairs at the training facility. Contractors with job openings and local unions are invited to exhibit at the fair. Many interviews and job placements occur during the fairs. As of January 2004, the program has graduated approximately 475 students, according to AHOHC. The program has achieved a job placement rate of over 70 percent. Several graduates have continued their environmental education by attending university or advanced study in environmental clean-up technologies while several other students have entered a local asbestos union's apprenticeship program.

The program has excelled in job placement efforts. Fortunately, the gloomy economy between 2000-2003 has not affected the job market for hazardous waste cleanups. Graduates of the program have been involved with large national and area-wide cleanups. Approximately 20 trainees have spent time participating in the cleanup of the World Trade Center site, the Pentagon site or the anthrax decontamination projects in the New York and Washington D.C. metropolitan areas. A few graduates participated in the mercury spill decontamination at a Washington, D.C.-area high school in 2003. While most trainees are placed with a variety of local companies, 38 of the graduates have been placed at the Navy Yard Superfund site with either the Public Works Center (a quasi-governmental agency responsible for construction and construction management at Naval District Washington facilities) or with Navy contractors. Other area contractors such as Envirocontrols and Southern Insulation (a signatory contractor with the Asbestos Workers Local Union #24) have hired many of the graduates.

A trainer for the class specifically mentioned that because of lack of funding for follow-up, it was difficult to track graduates employment status. According to the trainer, employment figures could be much higher than accounted for, but it was ultimately up to the graduate to inform him whether they were employed or not.

One of the earlier problems affecting the Washington Navy Yard SuperJTI program was a mismatch of jobs with the number of trainees graduating at a particular time. While this problem still exists to an extent, the

trainers have improved their communication with employers about when work will be available and have been able to schedule a program's graduation date appropriately.

A trainee provider said the excellent job placement rate is due to the broad range of training given. Furthermore, he said, "Nothing substitutes for caring trainers, appropriate funding, and contacts within the community and nearby employers for a successful program."

Partnering with EPA's Brownfields Program

Building upon the success of the program the Washington Navy Yard SuperJTI partnered with EPA's Brownfields Job Training program to create an advanced training program for SuperJTI graduates. Most students entering this class are seeking upward career mobility. Beginning in April 2004 with 17 students, training program topics include HAZWOPER, Geographic Information Systems (GIS), air sampling, hazardous communication, confined space, brownfields and site assessment, including training in the use of innovative assessment and cleanup technologies.

All students must be sponsored by their current employer for this training to be free. The program expects to train 58 students, achieve an 80 percent placement rate, and support career placement of graduated students for two years after the training is complete.

Trainee Feedback

In 2001, an unemployed 25-year old male was seeking a job, finding no luck for a living-wage job that didn't require a high school diploma. STRIVE DC referred him to the program and he knew he would have to act fast to apply since his 26th birthday was approaching, which would make him ineligible. His class was full of 24 other trainees, and while some of his peers did drop out, he was motivated to stay with the course because he knew it would lead to a higher-paying job.

At the program's career fair, the trainee was asked to work for two competing employers. He chose the higher paying position, where his entry-level pay was \$14/hr. During his time at work, he and his supervisor developed a strong friendship. When the company's work ran out, his SuperJTI training provider was able to connect him with a new job within two months that paid an even higher wage. Today, the graduate has returned to work for his original employer as an asbestos inspector. "I really like the program, the trainer, and the work I am given," said the graduate. "I hope to get into a management position someday."

Another recent graduate of the SuperJTI program said he also heard of the program from STRIVE DC. "I was currently going through their GED program," said the trainee, "and they urged me to participate in the SuperJTI program."

He was immediately hired after graduation, working as an asbestos mover in nearby Maryland. He said he was so pleased with the program, that his cousin decided to sign up as well. "I feel very lucky and blessed to have been selected for this program," said the graduate. "This was a great opportunity and best of all, it didn't cost me a cent. I now have a \$16/hour job."

Transportation to the training center or the workplace was not a problem for both trainees. And, both said the program had little to improve on. "Before [the program] I had no idea what asbestos was and now, I'm an asbestos mover," said the latter trainee. "This program was extremely helpful towards moving up in the world."

"Nothing substitutes for caring trainers, appropriate funding, and contacts within the community and nearby employers for a successful program."

—Training Provider

Employer Feedback

One of the earlier problems plaguing the program was the graduates' lack of work ethic and consistent job attendance. Horne Engineering, an employer who used to hire trainees, quit hiring graduates since many of the trainees were not committed to their jobs. Horne's HR specialist felt the program needed other components to address business skills and work ethics.

Perhaps a new leaf has turned for the program. An employer for EnviroControls, Inc. has hired approximately 25 graduates to date and continues to hire more. The company has been pleased with the quality of trainees and is satisfied with trainee's work performance as well.

EnviroControls says it believes in the program's goal and tries to support the graduates as much as possible. To overcome job attendance problems, EnviroControls bought a van to transport graduates to and from their work sites. EnviroControls also assigns new graduates to work beside experienced colleagues to expose the graduates to as much on-the-job training as possible. In return for hiring the graduates, EnviroControls believes they "gain the satisfaction of trying to help the disadvantaged within their community by offering them a job."

EnviroControls hired approximately 20 graduates for a mercury spill decontamination at a Washington, D.C.-area high school in 2003. The high school principal was pleased to see eleven of its graduates working for EnviroControls at the cleanup.

Summary of Successes/ Recommendations for Improvement

The Washington Navy Yard's Superfund Job Training Program was largely met with praise from the trainers, employers and students of the program. By overcoming earlier problems plaguing the program through flexibility and innovation in the classroom, such as addressing employer dissatisfaction with trainees' lack of work ethics and how to conduct themselves appropriately in the business place, the program has excelled beyond initial expectations. Interviewed graduates said the program was worthwhile. Students have gained high paying jobs through their broad range of skills and workplace experience. Both employers and trainees have benefited from the free SuperJTI training. Most of the trainees normally could not afford the requisite and often expensive hazardous waste training necessary to obtain jobs with upward mobility. Employers have benefited from their relationship with the trainers of the program by having instant access to a readily trained workforce. Since the original review of the program in December 2000, the program has addressed and overcome many of the earlier identified problems including:

- *SuperJTI program coordinators need to find additional avenues of employment for trainees other than just the nearby Superfund site. To date, the program trainer has successfully networked with more metro-wide private contractors which is where an overwhelmingly majority of the graduates find their work. Trainers have also been better about coordinating class graduation with work availability.*
- *Several trainees were required to have pre-employment physicals before an employer would hire them. Trainees are now provided free pre-employment physicals. Another addition to the program is the provision of fitness tests, required by many employers, at no cost to the trainee.*

- *SuperJTI participants need further instruction on how to conduct themselves in a business environment. Since 2000, the "soft skills" part of training, has been significantly increased and now consists of how to prepare a resume, interview skills and how to handle workplace problems. Personal finance and diversity education have also been added to the program as have math and reading refresher courses.*

One recommendation for improvement identified by the interviewees included the following:

The program should consider a full-time position for a program coordinator to track and follow-up with graduates for employment status and contact information. One trainer mentioned that too often an employer will call to request graduates for work but the trainer will be unable to provide very many graduates since he does not have recent contact information or know if a graduate is actively seeking work.

"I feel very lucky and blessed to have been selected for this program. This was a great opportunity and best of all, it didn't cost me a cent. I now have a \$16/hour job."

—Trainee
